



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
COLLEGE OF SOCIAL & BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES

Community Classroom

What is Politics?

Spring 2020

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 5:30-7:30 p.m.

January 16-March 5, 2020

Environmental and Natural Resources Building 2 (ENR2) # N120
1064 E. Lowell St.

PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS SYLLABUS IS NOT FINAL AND STILL SUBJECT TO CHANGE!

Professors: Noam Chomsky & Marv Waterstone

Contact Information

Professor

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Community Classroom Program

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Course Description

Politics is the process of making decisions applying to members of a group. As Harold Lasswell described it, politics is about who gets what, when and how, to which we would add, where.

This course is intended to take up a series of contemporary issues with an eye to placing these matters in appropriate contexts so that their origins, current status and interconnections become understandable, and hopefully, approachable.

Beginning with an overview of the formal and informal mechanisms that shape our views of the world, the course will examine how industrial state capitalism has come to dominate our thinking as the only way to organize the political economy to satisfy human needs and wants. In fact, at the present conjuncture, it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism. In the

subsequent weeks we will examine some of the most important consequences of organizing society along these lines. Finally, the course will take up questions of response and resistance to these phenomena. Here we intend to assess the achievements and difficulties involved as social movements agitate for change, as well as the role of critical pedagogy in attaining desirable social change.

Each week, the Tuesday lecture (by Professor Waterstone) will provide the necessary historical, theoretical, conceptual and substantive context for that week's topic. The Thursday lecture (by Professor Chomsky) will focus on concrete historical and contemporary examples to draw out and illustrate the phenomena discussed on Tuesdays. Additionally, each lecture session will provide the class, broken up into small groups, an opportunity to respond to discussion questions that will be formulated by Professors Chomsky and Waterstone. Finally, this year we will also reserve time during each class session for brief presentations by representatives from activist organizations working on issues pertinent to each week's topics.

Required Texts and Suggested Films

All materials will be made available through the SBS Forum website. Readings are delineated between "Required" and "Supplementary" on this syllabus and on the SBS Forum website.

Relevant films and movies will be recommended as appropriate.

Subject to Change Statement

Information contained in the course syllabus may be subject to change with advance notice, as deemed appropriate by the instructor.

SCHEDULE OF ASSIGNMENTS

Week 1—Introduction and Overview

Thursday, January 16: Our first class meeting will provide a general introduction to the course and cover course organization and logistics.

Week 2—How do we know what we know?

Tuesday, January 21: We will take up an overview of the formal and informal mechanisms that shape our views of the world (what we take as common sense). This will include, among others, the role of families and peers, the mass media, the education system, religion, and the culture industries. The week will conclude with an examination of the role of critical pedagogy in producing a viewpoint that is always

healthily skeptical of the taken-for-granted, pervasive common senses that prevail in societies at particular times and places.

Required Readings:

Kate Crehan, *Gramsci's Common Sense: Inequality and Its Narratives*. Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2016. Preface & Ch. 3.

Edward Bernays, "The Engineering of Consent." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 250 (1): 113-120, 1947.

It's a Fox News for Teenagers, In Short Videos (NYT; pdf; 5pp)

The Permanent Lie, Our Deadliest Threat (Chris Hedges; Truthdig; link)

Film Viewing:

Manufacturing Consent: Noam Chomsky and the Media. Dir. Mark Achbar & Peter Wintonick. 1992.

Thursday, January 23: We will concentrate on concrete examples about the role of the mass media, the PR industry, the educational system, and religion. We are particularly interested this year in examining the ongoing assaults on evidence and facts, and the demonization of journalism and journalists.

Required Reading:

Noam Chomsky, *Deterring Democracy*. London and New York: Verso, 1991. Chapter 12.

What to Make of the Jarring Return to News in 2020 (Dahlia Litwick; Slate; link)

New York Times Uncovers Conservative Attacks and Then Prints One; Both Are on the Front Page (George Lakoff; Common Dreams; link)

Supplemental Readings:

Journalistic Representations of Jeremy Corbin in the British Press: From Watchdog to Attack Dog (Media@LSE report; pdf; 18pp)

Week 3— Today's Dominant Common Sense

Tuesday, January 28: We will take up the ways in which the current, prevailing common sense represents a "capitalist realism," a worldview that posits that there is no realistic alternative to industrial state capitalism. Here we examine how this orientation has come to dominate our thinking regarding how we organize the political economy to satisfy human needs and wants. Are there alternatives? How are these characterized, trivialized, and criticized? How dominant is the capitalist worldview in reality? Given a choice, might many people opt for other ways to organize society?

Required Readings:

Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962. Prefaces (2002, 1982, 1962), Introduction and Chapter 1

Robin Hahnel, “Why the Market Subverts Democracy” *American Behavioral Scientist* 52 (7): 1006-1022, 2009.

Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2009. Chapters 1-3.

In Order to Understand the Brutality of American Capitalism, You Have to Start on the Plantation (NYT 1619 project; pdf; 6pp)

Film Viewing:

The Corporation, 2003, directed by Mark Achbar, Jennifer Abbot

Supplemental Readings:

Finland is Our Capitalist Paradise (NYT; pdf; 4pp)

We Need a New Capitalism (NYT; pdf; 4pp)

Thursday, January 30: We will discuss “really existing capitalism,” and compare it with the mythical capitalism that is a core part of contemporary ideology. Again, using concrete examples we will examine economic history (and its differing characteristics in various parts of the world over time), the creation of the so-called “Third World,” current forms of neoliberal capitalism, and the role of markets and “free” trade.

Required Readings:

Gar Alperovitz, “Principles of a Pluralist Economy: Introduction.” May 15, 2017. The Next System Project.

<https://thenextsystem.org/principles-introduction>

Against Economics (David Graeber; NYRB; pdf; 13pp; review of Robert Skidelsky’s *Money and Government: The Past and Future of Economics*)

Supplemental Readings:

Southerners, Facing Big Odds, Believe in a Path Out of Poverty (NYT; pdf; 3pp)

Week 4— Consequences of the “capitalist realism” orientation, Part 1.

Tuesday, February 4: We will begin to make the connections between the essential features of this form of late stage capitalism and its most pressing effects. These requirements of capitalism include, most critically, organizing the globe geopolitically to facilitate the spread of this form of political economy. At different historical moments this set of activities (which almost always has had as its objectives the securing of advantageous access to resources, markets, labor, and/or other favorable conditions of

production or sale of commodities) has been termed colonialism, imperialism, and/or neo-imperialism. In all of these forms, however, the quest for geopolitical dominance has posed grave dangers for those populations in the way of such expansion. At the present moment, these dangers are manifested as such existential threats to the human species as potential nuclear war and nuclear terrorism, the spread of nuclear weapons, and constant and expanding militarism and warfare. In this week, we will examine the various forms these threats have taken at different moments and in different regional contexts, as well as the rationales that have been used to justify such troubling developments.

Required Readings:

Excerpts from NSC 68, A Report to the National Security Council, 1950.

http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/coldwar/documents/pdf/10-1.pdf

The Global War of Error (TomDispatch; pdf; 7pp)

When the Media Supports It, It's Not a Coup (FAIR, pdf. 5pp)

Space Warriors: Democrats Give Trump His Space Force for Xmas (Karl Grossman; Counterpunch; link)

Film Viewings:

President Dwight D. Eisenhower's farewell address and warning about the military industrial complex, January 17, 1961.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OyBNmecVtdU>

Dirty Wars, 2013. Director: Rick Rowley

Supplemental Readings:

Chronicle of a Coup Foretold (Brian Mier; Counterpunch; link) (*Will the US left work to normalize the impending coup attempt in Mexico the way it did for Venezuela, Bolivia, Brazil and Nicaragua?*)

Mexico's Difficult "Fourth Transformation" A year after taking office, the Mexican president and his redistributive policies are very popular domestically, but international markets and the US, which dominates the Mexican economy, limit what he can actually do. (Luis Alberto Reygada; Le Monde Diplomatique; link)

Thursday, February 6: Concrete illustrations of the foregoing points. One focus would be on the threat of imminent destruction throughout the nuclear age, and the shocking record of near terminal disaster in part from accident and in part from highly adventurist choices of political leaders, including some that are very well documented but very poorly understood, like JFK's decisions at the peak of the missile crisis. And on the escalating dangers today, particularly at the Russian border, largely a result of NATO expansion since 1991, where we will focus on what is now known from recent archival scholarship. In particular we pay attention to recent developments concerning the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) and New Start Treaties.

We will also highlight the ways in which such militarism produces important local impacts and connections.

Required Readings:

Noam Chomsky, "The Most Dangerous Moment, '50 Years Later," *TomsDispatch.com* October 15, 2012. <http://www.tomdispatch.com/blog/175605/>

George P. Shultz, William J. Perry, Henry A. Kissinger, Sam Nunn, "A World Free of Nuclear Weapons," *Nuclear Security Project*, January 4, 2007.

<http://www.nuclearsecurityproject.org/publications/a-world-free-of-nuclear-weapons>

Materials from the William J. Perry Project <http://www.wjperryproject.org/about-the-project/>

Blood On Whose Hands? In survey after international survey, the United States is perennially voted the world's greatest threat to peace in most of the world's nations. (Brett Wilkins; Common Dreams; link)

Vietnam to Venezuela: US Interventionism and the Failure of the Left (Adolph Reed; Common Dreams; link)

Excerpts from D. Ellsberg *The Doomsday Machine* (Introduction and Ch. 21 "Dismantling the Doomsday Machine"; pdf)

US is a Rogue State: And Suleimani's Assassination Proves It (Truthout; link)
<https://truthout.org/articles/noam-chomsky-us-is-a-rogue-state-and-suleimanis-assassination-confirms-it/>

Supplemental Readings:

What if the World Treated the US Like a Rogue State? Some Risky but Practical Proposals to Harness a Superpower that has Clearly Lost Control (Samanth Subramanian; Huffpost Highline; link)

Week 5— Consequences of the “capitalist realism” orientation, Part 2.

Tuesday, February 11: Here we examine a second essential feature of industrial state capitalism: the quest for ever expanding profits. A critical implication of this need is the contradiction between the quest for infinite growth and the material reality of a finite planet. While long problematic in more localized settings, the scale of the capitalist system now poses such existential threats as climate change, massive environmental degradation, and irretrievable resource depletion. Again, we will make

clear the linkages between essential elements of this stage of capitalist development, its environmental impacts, and the reasons that, and ways in which, recognizing such connections are downplayed and obscured.

Required Readings:

John Bellamy Foster, *Ecology Against Capitalism*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2002. Preface and Chapter 2.

Marv Waterstone, “Adrift on a Sea of Platitudes: Why We Will Not Solve the Greenhouse Issue.” *Environmental Management* 17 (2): 141-152, 1993.

Climate Change is Brutal for Everyone, But Worse for Women (Matt Simon; Wired; link)

The Misogyny of Climate Deniers: Why Do Right-Wing Men Hate Greta Thunberg and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez So Much? (Martin Gelin; The New Republic; link)

Film Viewing:

Snowpiercer. Dir. Bong Joon-Ho. 2014.

Supplemental Readings:

Money is the Oxygen on Which the Fire of Global Warming Burns (Bill McKibben, New Yorker; pdf; 20pp)

Climate Change and Poverty (UN Human Rights Council; pdf; 21pp)

Thursday, February 13: The principal focus here will be on the second major threat to survival: global warming and climate change more generally. The discussion will review the basic facts and bring out one of the most astonishing features of modern history: the extraordinary marginalization of the most crucial question that has arisen in human history and even worse, the fact that a major political organization in the most powerful state in history not only denies the facts but is urging that we race to the precipice – and that all of this passes virtually without comment; hardly a word in the recent presidential campaign or coverage, even on the left. We will also extend Tuesday’s discussion, through concrete cases, of the incompatibility of unregulated capitalism with survival—given its demand for unsustainable growth and ignoring of externalities—along with its incompatibility with democracy.

Required Readings:

C.J. Polychroniou, Interview with Noam Chomsky and Robert Pollin, Truthout, September 18, 2019. Available at: <https://truthout.org/articles/noam-chomsky-and-robert-pollin-if-we-want-a-future-green-new-deal-is-key/>

R. Pierrehumbert, “There is no Plan B for Dealing with the Climate Crisis.” Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, August 30, 2019. Available at: <https://thebulletin.org/2019/08/there-is-no-plan-b-for-dealing-with-the-climate-crisis/>

There is No Plan B for Dealing with the Climate Crisis (Raymond Pierrehumbert; Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists; link)

Greta Thunberg speech at COP 25. (link) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ml3f0KeZnsY>

Supplemental Readings:

Emissions Gap Report 2019, Executive Summary (UNEP; pdf; 16pp)

Getting to a Carbon-Free Economy (Jeffrey Sachs; American Prospect; link; a bit long)

Week 6— Consequences of the “capitalist realism” orientation, Part 3.

Tuesday, February 18: Here we take up questions of the more mundane and pervasive, but nevertheless devastating, effects of the current globalized and neoliberal forms of late stage capitalism. We will explore the roots and impact of the neoliberal globalized stage of state capitalism, with the tendencies towards plutocracy, monopolization and secular stagnation, as well as the shifting nature national power (vis a vis the power of global capital) in the contemporary period. Again, we will demonstrate the necessary connections between these phenomena and the current stage of capitalist formation.

Required Readings:

Lewis F. Powell, Jr. “The Powell Memorandum/Manifesto” Aug 23, 1971.

http://reclaimdemocracy.org/powell_memo_lewis/

Zygmunt Bauman, *Wasted Lives: Modernity and Its Outcasts*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2004. Introduction and Chapter 3.

Henry Giroux, “Culture of Cruelty: The Age of Neoliberal Authoritarianism,” *Counterpunch.org* Oct. 23, 2015.

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2015/10/23/culture-of-cruelty-the-age-of-neoliberal-authoritarianism/>

Every American Family Basically Pays an \$8,000 “Poll Tax” Under the US Health System, Top Economists Say (WaPo; pdf; 2pp)

Make No Mistake: Medicare for All Would Cut Taxes for Most Americans (Emmanuel Saez and Gabriel Zucman; Guardian; link)

Film Viewing:

Two Days, One Night. Dirs. Jean-Pierre Dardenne & Luc Dardenne, 2014.

Supplemental Readings:

When Medical Debt Collectors Decide Who Gets Arrested (Lizzie Presser; Propublica; link)

Thursday, February 20: We will review a number of specific examples of these effects, which include increasing wealth and income inequality, reductions of state support for citizens (often under the harsh requirements of imposed austerity programs), privatization and enclosure of commons resources and services, the increasing production of surplus/disposable people (which includes a portion of the massive, current refugee and immigrant streams, as well as enormous and growing prison populations), and the policing and surveillance of domestic populations.

Required Readings:

David Kotz, “End of the Neoliberal Era.” *New Left Review*, September/October 2018. (pdf)

Alfred W. McCoy, “It’s Not Just Trump: A Toxic Right-Wing Nationalism Is Rising Across the Planet.” *Alternet*, April 2, 2017.

<https://www.alternet.org/2017/04/its-not-just-trump-toxic-right-wing-nationalism-rising-across-planet/>

Fintan O’Toole, “Trial Runs for Fascism are in Full Flow.” *Irish Times*, June 24, 2018.

<https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/fintan-o-toole-trial-runs-for-fascism-are-in-full-flow-1.3543375>

“Shit-Life Syndrome,” Trump Voters, and Clueless Dems (Bruce Levine; Counterpunch; link)

Yes, America is Rigged Against Workers (Steven Greenhouse; Portside; link)

Supplemental Readings:

ALEC Attacks: How Evangelicals and Corporations Captured State Lawmaking to Safeguard White Supremacy and Corporate Power (Center for Constitutional Rights, et al., pdf; 60pp)

Podcast: What Neoliberalism Left Behind: Interview with Wendy Brown (Democracy Works; link)

Week 7—Response and resistance

Tuesday, February 25: The phenomena we have been discussing thus far in the course do not take place without impact and consequences. In this week, we take up questions of the multi-faceted ways that those affected by the machinations of late stage, neoliberal, globalized capitalism respond. Each of the sets of impacts that we have examined have given rise to social movements of many kinds, from peace and

environmental activism, to calls for social, political, cultural, and economic justice. In this week, we will examine the ways in which these diverse movements might find common ground, and thus political alliance and solidarity.

Required Readings:

Kate Crehan, *Gramsci's Common Sense: Inequality and Its Narratives*. Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2016. Chapter 7.

James. O'Connor. *Natural Causes: Essays in Ecological Marxism*. New York: The Guilford Press, 1998. Pp 255-265 and Chapters 15 & 19.

Ian G. R. Shaw and Marv Waterstone, *Wageless Life: A Manifesto for a Future Beyond Capitalism*. 2019. University of Minnesota Press. Chapters 1, 11 & 12.

Our founding ideals of liberty and equality were false when they were written. Black Americans fought to make them true. Without this struggle, America would have no democracy at all (NYT 1619 intro; pdf; 7pp)

Film Viewing:

Zapatista. Dirs. Benjamin Eichert, Richard Rowley, & Ståle Sandberg. 1999.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vBqIowBEL60>

Supplemental Readings:

Saving Lives is Not a Crime: Politically Motivated Legal Harassment Against Migrant Human Rights Defenders by the USA (Amnesty International; pdf; 44 pp.)

Thursday, February 27: We will begin with an examination of historical predecessors to today's social movements that include anti-slavery and anti-colonial resistances, early contests over industrialization and waged labor, and the civil rights and feminist movements. With this background, we then intend to assess the achievements and difficulties involved in such contemporary phenomena as the Arab Spring, the Occupy movement, Black Lives Matter, the indignados, the Bernie Sanders' and Donald Trump mobilizations, the Brexit vote, and a variety of social movements agitating for social change.

Required Readings:

Primary Documents from Social Movements TBD (i.e. Black Lives Matter, Fight for Fifteen, Los Indignados, Podemos, No More Deaths/No Más Muertes, etc.)

Document Reveals The FBI is Tracking Border Protest Groups as Extremist Organizations (Jane Winter and Hunter Walker; Huffpost; link)

New Documents Show Government Targeted NYC Pastor For Officiating Immigrant Weddings (Jack Jenkins; Religious News Service; link)

Ritual Protest and the Theater of Dissent (Virginia Hotchkiss; Nonsite.org; link)

Week 8—The Current State of the World and Prospects for Change

Tuesday, March 3: Given all of the foregoing, we return to the title of the course “What is Politics?” in order to examine the most current events on the political stage. Because we are preparing this course outline several months before these final two sessions, we cannot say for certain what these issues will be, but they are likely to include the U.S. and U.K. election processes, continuing mass reactions around the globe to the neoliberal project (including Brexit), the ramifications of the Trump impeachment attempt, and the ongoing rise of authoritarian repression in response to citizen unrest. We will make use of these examinations in order to provoke contemplation on what would constitute progressive change, and how such change might be brought about. In approaching these matters we also return to the potential contribution of critical pedagogy and the role of informed and activist intellectuals, scholars and citizens.

Required Readings:

Marv Waterstone, “Smoke and Mirrors: Inverting the Discourse on Tobacco.” *Antipode* 42(4): 875-896, 2010.

Henry Giroux, “Cultural Studies, Public Pedagogy and the Responsibility of Intellectuals.” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 1 (1): 59-79, 2004.
<http://www.public.iastate.edu/~drrussel/www548/giroux-respofintells.pdf>

What the Reactionary Politics of 2019 Owe to the Politics of Slavery (NYT 1619 project; pdf; 4pp)

Supplemental Readings:

TBA

Thursday, March 5: We will tie together themes already discussed, and explore conceptions of the common good from the Enlightenment to the present. In terms of the educational system, we will contrast the traditional concept of education as a vessel into which one pours water with the Humboldtian view of education as laying out a string along which the student pursues his/her own course, with the goal of encouraging innate curiosity and the desire to inquire and create, to challenge and to discover. We will connect these concepts to the current state of education, bringing in the current imposition of business models particularly in reaction to the liberating and democratizing tendencies of the 1960s.

Required Readings:

Noam Chomsky, *What Kind of Creatures Are We?* New York: Columbia University Press, 2015. Chapter 3.

The Deadliest Crossing (Jason Motlagh; Rolling Stone; link)

Film Viewing:
TBD

Supplemental Readings:
TBA